

THE MCDONALDIZATION OF ENGLISH AS A SECOND LANGUAGE IN THE  
UNITED STATES

A Thesis

by

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## ABSTRACT

Ritzer's theory of the McDonaldization of society in general and of education in particular is firmly established in the field of sociology, but has not been used to inform research in ESL (English as a second language) training. The phrase, "McDonaldization of education," has become standard in the literature, but has not been extended or applied to issues surrounding the use of standardized tests for ESL education in the United States. The characteristics of McDonaldization are efficiency, predictability, control, and calculability. This study reviews the literature on the McDonaldization of society and education, and contrasts this literature with the humanistic psychologies of James, Vygotsky, Piaget, Erikson, and Dewey, as they influenced education. These humanistic psychologists advocated teaching methods that oppose McDonaldization, including the nurturing of spontaneity, curiosity, life-long learning, and joy in learning. ESL education has been influenced by McDonaldization along with other fields in education.

The No Child Left Behind Act (NCLB) was passed in 2001 and was replaced with Every Student Succeeds Act (ESSA) in 2015. A large body of research literature on NCLB concludes that NCLB discouraged native language instruction via bilingual education because of pressure on administrators, educators, and students to achieve high test scores on English-only standardized tests, and because of its explicit focus on learning English as quickly and efficiently as possible. Despite some differences from NCLB, ESSA maintains the previous use of standardized tests, punishment of schools

for poor performance, discouragement of bilingual education, and focus on quick and efficient mastery of English for English language learners. These trends exemplify Ritzer's McDonaldization of society theory. The State of Arizona's highly structured and restrictive language education program will be analyzed as a case study and an illustration of the impact of McDonaldization on English language learner (ELL) students. It is concluded that researchers should invoke Ritzer's theory in studying the impact of the McDonaldized culture of standardization upon ESL students, and seek ways to preserve the legacy of humanistic psychology.

## CONTRIBUTORS AND FUNDING SOURCES

### Contributors

This work was supervised by a thesis committee consisting of Professor Monica Neshyba and Professor Jacqueline Stillisano of the Department of Teaching, Learning and Culture and Professor Stjepan Mestrovic of the Department of Sociology.

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## CHAPTER I

### INTRODUCTION

Ritzer's book, *The McDonaldization of Society*, was first published in 1993. Ritzer's theory of the McDonaldization of society holds that all modern societies, but especially the United States, are increasingly trending in the direction of efficiency, calculability, predictability, and control. He used the metaphor of fast-food restaurants in general, and McDonald's in particular, to illustrate these social forces. For example, if one dines at a non-McDonaldized, mom and pop restaurant, one cannot predict or control what will be on the menu, how and when it will be served, or how much it will cost. In contrast to this experience, a cheeseburger bought at a McDonald's in College Station, Texas will be exactly the same as a cheeseburger bought anywhere in America, from Spokane to Miami. Ritzer applies this McDonaldization tendency in all social institutions: health-care, banking, the police and military, and others up to and including education. Education in America has become increasingly McDonaldized in its focus on standardized tests, rigid lesson plans, centralized control of curriculum, and overall goal that all American children will have the exact same education (Ritzer, 2015).

A layperson may want to regard efficiency, calculability, predictability, and control as desirable and beneficial cultural trends. Ritzer (2015) acknowledges that many people are attracted to McDonaldization because it is "the only world they know" and "represents their standard of good taste and quality" (p. 159). However, he views McDonaldization in a negative light.

Weber was a German classical sociologist who introduced the concept of the Iron Cage in his book, *The Protestant Ethic and the Spirit of Capitalism* (1958). Ritzer builds his theory of the McDonaldization of society on Weber's concept of the Iron Cage, a condition in which joy in living and spontaneity are sacrificed for the sake of efficiency, predictability, calculability, and control. Wasting time becomes the worst sin. Every minute of every day must be accounted for some predictable and controlled goal while working in a bureaucracy, regardless of the stress it causes on humans in the Iron Cage.

In roughly the same time period in which Weber (1904, 1958) introduced the concept of the Iron Cage, James (1899, 2000), who is known as the founding father of American psychology and is also very influential in sociology (Macionis, 2013), introduced the opposing concept of pragmatism as an open-ended process of discovery that promotes the development of individuals with unique and authentic selves. In his lectures and subsequent book, *William James Talks to Teachers* (1899, 2000), James advocated teaching as a way to promote curiosity, discovery, and the development of a unique self. James's (1890, 2017) writings on the self and identity influenced teacher training in the United States in the early 20th century (Baldwin, 1911; Gavin, 1976; James, 1890, 1981). According to McDermott (2008), James influenced not only early education in America, but other intellectuals who promote these ideals, among them Dewey (2004), Piaget (1971), Vygotsky (1978), and Erikson (1993). For example, and in complete opposition to the McDonaldization of society, Dewey (2004) viewed the classroom as an unstructured setting in which students would proceed at their own pace in individual discovery. Even when James is not cited or credited, contemporary

research on identity, inclusion, and development of the self in the classroom uses concepts that were first introduced by him (Grljusic & Kolak, 2018; Hornberger, 2007; Parkin, 1990; Wagner, 2018; Worthy & Nunez, 2016). This is important because, according to Ritzer (1993, 2015), McDonaldization dehumanizes people, reduces their identities to quantifiable factors, and in other ways, is inimical to humanistic principles of identity, inclusion, and development of the self.

According to many authors, McDonaldization and the Iron Cage have gained the upper hand in American culture in general and education in particular (Andrews, Silk, Francombe, & Bush, 2013; Dandaneau & Dodworth, 2006; Hartley, 1995; Ritzer, Jandric, & Hayes, 2018; Rojek, 2007). The phrase, “McDonaldization of education,” has become standard in the literature, but has not been extended or applied to issues surrounding the use of standardized tests for English as a Second Language (ESL) education in the United States.

## THE PROBLEM

The problem that will be addressed in this thesis is concerned with the effects upon and responses to the McDonaldization of ESL education in the United States. ESL refers to teaching English to non-native speakers in an English-speaking country (Alharbi, 2015). Because there are no research studies on the McDonaldization of ESL education, this thesis will be restricted to interpreting existing research studies in the context of Ritzer’s (1993, 2015) theory of McDonaldization. Ritzer (1993, 2015) claims that all of American culture, including education, is becoming increasingly McDonaldized. While the McDonaldization of education has been explored in the



existing literature (Barker, 1993; Nicholson, 2015; Peticca-Harris, Weststar, & McKenna, 2015; Ritzer, Jandric, & Hayes, 2018; Rojek, 2007), the McDonaldization of ESL education has not yet been explored.

## METHOD

This thesis will rely upon library research of several components of this problem: A review of the literature on the McDonaldization of education and its effects, methods of escape from or resistance to McDonaldization, and the influence that humanistic psychologists have exerted on educational theory and practice. Because the use of standardized tests is a key component of Ritzer's (2015) McDonaldization of education theory, the use of standardized tests on ELL students as part of the NCLB program will be analyzed.

The No Child Left Behind Act (NCLB) was passed in 2001 and was replaced with Every Student Succeeds Act (ESSA) in 2015. A large body of research literature on NCLB concludes that NCLB discouraged bilingual education because of pressure on administrators, educators, and students to achieve high test scores on English-only standardized tests, and because of its explicit focus on learning English as quickly and efficiently as possible (Cohen and Allen, 2012; Forrest, 2004; Hornberger & Lin, 2012; Johnson & Brandt, 2008; Li, 2007; Menken & Solorza, 2014; Zehr, 2007). According to Li (2007) "NCLB has led to the death of bilingual education" (p. 558). Because ESSA is more recent than NCLB, there is less research literature on ESSA than on NCLB. However, the existing literature on ESSA leads to the conclusion that despite some differences from NCLB, it maintains the previous use of standardized tests, punishment

of schools for poor performance, discouragement of bilingual education, and focus on quick and efficient mastery of English for ELL students (Adler-Greene, 2019; Fusarelli, 2019, Karp, 2016, Saultz, Schneider & McGovern, 2019). For the purposes of this thesis, the most important similarities between NCLB and ESSA are the use of standardized tests, which exemplify Ritzer's (2015) McDonaldization of society theory, and the *de facto* replacement of bilingual education with ESL instruction. This is because educators find it efficient to teach ELL students only in English in order to prepare them for various mandated standardized tests (Cohen & Allen, 2012; Forrest, 2004; Hornberger & Lin, 2012 Johnson & Brandt, 2008; Li, 2007; Menken & Solorza, 2014; Zehr, 2007). For these reasons, the focus of this thesis shall be on the McDonaldized aspects of NCLB rather than ESSA, and on ESL rather than on various models of bilingual education.

In addition, the State of Arizona's highly structured and restrictive language education program will be analyzed as a case study and an illustration of the impact of McDonaldization on ELL students (Fredricks & Warriner, 2016). Arizona's program will be used as an illustration of and vehicle for discussing issues pertaining to how standardized testing and other components of McDonaldization affect ESL programs in the United States.

## SIGNIFICANCE OF THE PROBLEM

Many scholars have concluded that the McDonaldization of education is occurring at an increasing pace and that escape from this trend is not realistically possible because McDonaldization affects every aspect of American society (Barker,

1993; Krol, 2011; Nicholson, 2015; Peticca-Harris, Weststar, & McKenna, 2015; Ritzer, Jandric, & Hayes, 2018; Rojek, 2007; Stan, 2013; Wilkinson, 2006). Also, some scholars suggest that the humanistic principles of psychology for education recommended by James (1899, 2000), Erikson (1993), Vygotsky (1978), Piaget (1971), and others are incompatible with the McDonaldization of society in general and education in particular because McDonaldization is dehumanizing whereas humanistic psychology treats people as individuals with unique identities (Andrews et al., 2013; Dandaneau & Dodworth, 2006; Ritzer, 2015). Because Ritzer's (2015) theory posits that McDonaldization is a ubiquitous process affecting all aspects of American society, it follows that McDonaldization should also affect ESL education. But this specific connection between McDonaldization and ESL education, specifically regarding training and assessment, has not been addressed in the literature, and for this reason, is being explored in this thesis.

Ritzer's (1993) theory on the McDonaldization of society was inspired by Weber, who concluded that escape from the Iron Cage would be possible only after "the last ton of fossilized fuel" was spent (Weber, 1904, 1958, p. 181). In other words, society would have to disintegrate completely and start anew. Waiting for this doomsday scenario to possibly occur seems impractical.

## CHAPTER II

### THE MCDONALDIZATION OF EDUCATION, AND NO ESCAPE FROM THE IRON CAGE

The significance of Ritzer's (1993) theory is that the McDonaldization of American culture as a whole has an influence on education in general as a social institution, and within the field of education, on ESL programs. His theory will be interpreted and applied to ESL based upon his general perspective on the McDonaldization of education. When applying his theory to education, Ritzer (2015) gives many examples of McDonaldization. With regard to the calculability component of McDonaldization, he observes the following trends: the use of grade point averages to summarize a student's educational experience, taking standardized tests with quantifiable results, and picking universities that are highly ranked in order to increase chances in obtaining jobs. The significance of these examples, in Ritzer's (2015) view, is that they illustrate dehumanization in education (p. 147). Dehumanization is the opposite of the perspective of humanistic psychology that will be analyzed in the following chapter.

The control aspect of McDonaldization also introduces what Ritzer calls the "tyranny of the clock" (p. 91) and the "tyranny of the lesson plan" (p. 91) in education. Class must end at a prescribed time even if students are excited by a topic. The teacher must teach to the lesson plan, and also to the test, and may not deviate on a topic that is of passionate interest to the teacher or students. The significance of these observations is

that because of standardized tests in general and NCLB and ESSA standardized tests in particular, administrators and teachers tend toward English-only instruction of ELLs in order to achieve targeted test scores as efficiently as possible (Krol, 2011; Li, 2007; Menken, 2006).

It seems that this humanistic approach has been replaced with phenomena referred to as the tyranny of time (Trubowitz, 1972) and teaching to the test (Menken, 2006). By tyranny of time, Trubowitz is referring to the pressures that educators feel to cover every aspect of the lesson plan in an allotted time frame rather than digress on a topic or aspect of the lesson plan that is particularly interesting to and worthwhile for students. By teaching to the test, Menken means that educators respond to the pressure on them to prepare students to take various, mandated standardized tests by devising lesson plans geared toward the questions that will be asked on the tests rather than toward topics that they believe are relevant and important. Because of the pressures placed by NCLB and ESSA for high scores on standardized tests, administrators and educators feel that they do not have the time to fully implement the principles of humanistic psychology.

In 2018, Ritzer (Ritzer, Jandric, & Hayes, 2018) gave an interview to two scholars on the theory he developed, the McDonaldization of society, and he specifically made reference to education. Ritzer argues that all aspects of modern culture, including education, are becoming increasingly McDonaldized, resulting in a dehumanized Iron Cage. He also introduced the concept of the “velvet Iron Cage” to capture the idea that

most people are only dimly aware of this process, and to the extent that they are aware, they like being imprisoned in their cages, as if the cages were made of velvet.

Another important concept put forward by Ritzer (2015) is that of the “rubber Iron Cage,” which makes reference to the attitude of those who recognize the dehumanization of their lives but compensate for this feeling by escaping temporarily on weekends and vacations. Ritzer believes that “although the bars may seem like rubber, they are still there” (p. 160). These ideas suggest that this scholar shares Weber’s (1904, 1958) dark and pessimistic outlook by “viewing the future as a ‘polar night of icy darkness and hardness’” (Ritzer, p. 160). The overall point seems to be that for Ritzer, regardless of people’s attitudes toward the Iron Cage—whether they recognize its existence or not, view it as velvet or rubber or iron, favor or dislike it—it cannot be escaped.

The importance of Ritzer’s (2015) development of the concepts of velvet and rubber Iron Cages is that a favorable or tolerant attitude toward McDonaldization means that people are unlikely to rebel or try to escape from their social “cages.” The significance of this insight is that it helps to explain why, despite cogent criticisms of NCLB, ESSA is perceived by some scholars more as a repackaging of NCLB (Karp, 2016) or reform without repair of NCLB (Saultz & Schneider, 2019) rather than an escape from the Iron Cage of standardized testing.

Andrews and his colleagues (2013) compare and contrast Dewey’s philosophy of education with Ritzer’s (1993) description of the McDonaldization of education. These researchers believe that 20th century educational training and principles were informed

by humanistic and democratic principles such as the ones introduced by Dewey in his work. In *Democracy and Education*, (1916, 2004) Dewey argued that the overall purpose of education was to create responsible citizens who could think for themselves and make informed decisions. Andrews et al., (2013) argue that, contrary to Dewey's philosophy, and because of McDonaldization, education today is based upon corporate and marketing principles. This seems to be one way of interpreting Ritzer's overall theory of McDonaldization: that the business principles applied to fast-food restaurants have spilled over into other social institutions, including education. This assessment is relevant to ESL programs in the United States in that ELLs are forced to take nation-wide, standardized tests in English even when their English proficiency is insufficient for them to compete fairly with native speakers (Forrest, 2004; Li, 2007; Menken & Solorza, 2014). The corporate and marketing principles involved are that schools, teachers, and administrators are punished financially if they do not meet specific goals set by state and federal governments (Karp, 2016; Li, 2007).

As previously indicated, Ritzer (2015) is dubious about the possibility of resisting McDonaldization or escaping from the Iron Cage. In fact, the author believes that most people like and crave living in an Iron Cage culture because the last few generations have been McDonaldized since birth and have not been exposed to alternatives. They do not know anything but McDonaldization. They are born in McHospitals, dropped off at McChild care centers (Ritzer, 2015, p. 125), graduate from McUniversities, get McJobs, and end their lives in "the McDonaldization of the dying process" (Ritzer, 2015, p. 99).

The studies presented in this chapter appear to suggest the existence of trends toward increasing McDonaldization in American culture and education. A culture of standardization, including the use of standardized tests, has taken over the field of education. One impact upon ESL education has been that ELLs are expected to master the English language quickly and efficiently—in one year in the state of Arizona—and often take these standardized tests without sufficient mastery of English (Fredricks & Warriner, 2016).



### CHAPTER III

#### THE LEGACY OF HUMANISTIC PSYCHOLOGY IN AMERICAN EDUCATION

The teaching profession has been influenced by two contradictory cultural forces. The first is the influence of the cultural turn toward psychology as a guide for teaching, pedagogy, and the socialization of schoolchildren. This turn took place at the end of the nineteenth century, and began with the works of James (1890, 1950). James's influence is far reaching, and extends to many other psychologists who influenced pedagogy and the teaching profession. The other cultural turn is the McDonaldization of education, along the lines of the social forces discussed by Ritzer (1993). As a sociological concept, McDonaldization refers to the tendencies in all areas of culture to imitate the principles of fast-food restaurants: efficiency, predictability, control, and calculability.

These two cultural forces contradict each other at every turn in education. The legacy of James (1899, 2000) is that teachers and schools focus on understanding children, including their identity formation and the development of the self in relation to peers and others. The legacy of McDonaldization in education is present in standardized tests, quantitative evaluation, efficient syllabi, and rewards versus punishments for schools as well as teachers based on performance by schoolchildren on quantitative tests. McDonaldization does not pay attention to understanding humanistic concepts such as the ones brought forward by James and other psychologists. According to Ritzer, education is a dehumanizing cultural tendency that treats schoolchildren as things and

turns the classroom into an “Iron Cage.” The consequences of dehumanizing ELLs through a culture of standardized tests is that this culture negatively affects student confidence, test scores, and drop-out rates (Li, 2007).

## THE INFLUENCE OF JAMES ON EDUCATION

James (1890, 2017) is known primarily as the founding father of American psychology. Before James and the establishment of psychology, topics that fall under the domain of psychology today were referred to as “moral philosophy” (Baldwin, 1911). What is less appreciated about this scholar’s contributions is that he influenced American pedagogy by urging educators to use the principles of psychology in their classrooms. This was a novel idea in the 1890s and early 1900s, and continues to influence educators today (Creswell, Wagoner, & Hayes, 2017; Podeschi, 1976). Moreover, the psychological theories used in the field of education were also influenced by James. Theorists such as Erikson (1993), Piaget (1971), Vygotsky (1978), and especially Dewey (2004), elaborated upon James’s ideas that the child possesses a unique, social self that needs to be nurtured and developed, and develops through play, game, and structured activities. James and these other psychologists he influenced are referred to as *humanistic psychologists*, and their theories stand in stark contrast to the principles of McDonaldization (i.e., predictability, control, efficiency, and calculability). This is important because researchers examining the effects of NCLB have found that ELLs experience poor self-confidence and a sense that their education is meaningless because they are unable to communicate effectively in a school atmosphere that values test results over nurturing their identities (Li, 2007).

Baldwin (1911) explains the contributions of James (1899, 2000) to the field of education by explaining James's (1890, 1950) fundamental insights. Baldwin believes that prior to James, teachers were not informed by psychological principles in their training. James's fundamental insights are that humans, like animals, have instincts. Among these instincts are curiosity and a desire to imitate. Another important principle put forward is that the child is a body as well as a mind. This means that learning occurs when the body reacts to what the mind receives. If there is no bodily expression of interest or joy in learning, then learning has not been truly received or achieved. The third principle is that the child brings native resources to the classroom, including previously held knowledge which must be assimilated and combined with new knowledge. Finally, learning depends upon the organized creation of habits that eventually become second nature. In sum, before James's influence, educators and parents sought to mold children without any organized knowledge of how children learn. After his influence, parents sought to understand children.

Van Compernelle and Williams (2013) analyze the relationship between Vygotsky's (1978) theory of learning and second language education. They start with the premise that Vygotsky was a sociocultural theorist. However, they argue that most research studies on bilingual education focus on the teacher, minus the sociocultural and institutional background that the teacher brings to the classroom. Van Compernelle and Williams argue that research studies should focus not only on the teacher but also on curriculum, administration policies, and other institutional as well as socio-political factors. The novel connection made in this thesis is that McDonaldization is a

sociocultural factor that should be taken into account by researchers studying the impact of the culture of standardization on ELLs.

Piaget (1971) and Erikson (1993) have been highly influential in educational theory and practice as well as in the fields of both psychology and sociology (Macionis, 2013). Both theorists assume that every child is unique and proceeds at his or her own pace in cognitive and social development. This assumption is contradicted by McDonaldizing principles that aim to speed up development in the name of efficiency, and far from regarding children as unique, treat them as dehumanized objects reducible to quantification. Both Piaget and Erikson place great emphasis on children's play as an important and serious component of development. By contrast, proponents of the theory of McDonaldization view play and recess as an inefficient waste of time. Finally, both Piaget and Erikson stress that society and culture either help or hinder the child's progress through various stages of development. For example, in order to pass successfully through Erikson's (1993) first stage of development, trust versus mistrust, the child must interact with caretakers who respond to the baby's cries for food, shelter, affection, and diaper change. Caretakers, ranging from parents to teachers and other authority figures, similarly play an important role in providing a nurturing environment for all of the other stages of development. Clearly, the McDonaldization process, with its timetables, schedules, quotas, and rigid formulas cannot and does not provide a nurturing socio-cultural environment for a child at any stage of development.

## ANALYZING THE SHIFT IN EDUCATIONAL PHILOSOPHY TOWARD STANDARDS-BASED EDUCATION

President George W. Bush's 2001 No Child Left Behind (NCLB) Act landmark legislation aimed to eliminate inequalities in opportunities for success in schools (Macionis, 2013). In addition, President Obama's 2015 Every Student Succeeds (ESSA) program imposed national standards for achievements that were drafted by experts on all school districts. The overall change in teaching philosophies over the past 50 years has been from independent school districts implementing their own interpretations of American educational values to one of using standardized core curriculum (Li, 2007; Menken & Solorza, 2014).

There is a significant trend toward standardization in education that exemplifies an increase in the McDonaldization of education. The NCLB legislation has not had the desired impact of equalizing the academic performance of students on standardized tests in many schools. In fact, "by 2012, forty-eight percent of the nation's public schools had been labeled as failing because they missed their performance targets" (Macionis, 2013, p. 481). Applying Ritzer's (2015) theory of the McDonaldization of society to these findings, one could interpret them as being examples of what he calls the irrationality of excessive rationalization in the McDonaldization process (p. 132). McDonaldization standardizes and thereby dehumanizes education. The failures to achieve the stated goals of standardization such as equality of opportunity are due to the fact that students and teachers are trapped in the Iron Cage of bureaucracy, rather than being motivated by

individualism, curiosity, love of learning and other goals set by humanistic psychologists. Specifically, and in response to NCLB, schools shifted their focus from bilingual education to English-only instruction of ELLs for the sake of achieving higher scores on the mandated standardized tests (Li, 2007; Menken & Solorza, 2014; Cohen & Allen, 2012; Zehr, 2007).

Jones and Jones (2013) cite humanistic psychology as the central template for American education since the 1960s. The basic premise of this wide body of research is that children cannot develop into productive, educated individuals until their basic needs are met by society, teachers, parents, and other authority figures. This humanistic approach builds upon the works of theorists like Piaget (1971) and Erikson (1993), among others.

Borich (2007) presents the essential elements of effective curriculum development and instruction. Instruction is an important topic because it exemplifies, mirrors, or borrows from culture, and in this case, a McDonaldized culture. Some of these elements include a focus on learning as a process rather than the memorization of concrete facts and the need to understand students in terms of their individual as well as cultural backgrounds. Borich alludes to the importance of being mindful of “cultural frames of reference” in teaching (p. 57). By this he means that the teacher must be aware that much of what passes as instruction comes from a Eurocentric and “white frame of reference” (Feagin, 2009). As such, members of underrepresented groups will have a difficult time engaging with assumptions and presumed facts that conflict with their cultural frames of reference. This is a serious problem given that the high school drop-

out rates are 18.3% for Hispanics and 9.9% for African-Americans compared with 4.8% for whites (Jones & Jones, 2013). Research studies have shown that subtle biases from the white frame of reference enter into the questions asked on IQ tests, Scholastic Aptitude Tests, and other standardized tests (Slavin, 2012). This is significant because one of the overall goals of both NCLB and ESSA has been to provide equal opportunities for all schoolchildren, but this goal is hampered by cultural bias in standardized tests.

But again, the underlying problem here seems to lie with the McDonaldization process that does not account for different cultural frames of reference. In fact, the McDonaldization process itself is arguably a privileged, Eurocentric, Protestant-based frame of reference. This is because McDonaldization is based upon the Puritan ethic, which began in primarily white regions of Western Europe and New England in the United States, among individuals and groups that were more educated and financially secure than non-white populations (MacLennan, 2013). The very terms efficiency, predictability, control, and calculability imply cultural values that are not necessarily shared by all cultures that are more tolerant of inefficiency and unpredictability, and encourage joy in living.

## CHAPTER IV

### THE IMPACT OF POLICIES ON LANGUAGE EDUCATION

Before turning to a case study of Arizona's ELL program in the context of NCLB, it is helpful to examine the nation-wide context for the discussion that follows. Arizona is used as a case study in order to illustrate the issues that have been introduced in this thesis. For example, Zehr (2007) concludes that bilingual programs across the entire United States have decreased in number due to the focus of NCLB on ELLs. Cohen and Allen (2002) argue that in Alaska, standardized testing policies in general and NCLB tests in particular have resulted in a diminution of American Indian and Alaska Native languages and community revitalization.

Forrest (2004) notes that NCLB excludes any mention of biliteracy, bicultural, and bilingual programs, resulting in the focus on ELL students learning English as quickly and efficiently as possible. NCLB also called for ELL students to meet the same high standards as native speakers on standardized tests.

Menken and Solorza (2014) cite a dramatic loss of bilingual education programs in New York City due to NCLB, which were replaced with English-only programs. The authors contrast New York State's implicit anti-bilingual education policies with explicit anti-bilingual education policies in California, Arizona, and Massachusetts. In all these states, administrators had concluded that the most efficient way to achieve the test score goals for their schools was to focus on English-only instruction of ELLs.



Li (2007) cites research studies in Massachusetts, New York, and Washington, D.C. which suggest that because of the pressures of NCLB on testing and punishment of failed schools, ELL students have higher dropout rates compared with other students, are inadequately prepared for the content area standardized tests, and are outperformed on the tests by native speakers. Li cites several reasons why NCLB has these negative effects: It discourages bilingual education, negatively affects the self-confidence of ELL students, and shifts the focus from teaching ELL students to testing them. Moreover, Li notes that the words “bilingual education” were dropped from NCLB, and that “Congress has embarked on a new English-only era under the guidance of the new Office of English Language Acquisition, Language Enhancement, and Academic Achievement for Limited-English-Proficient Students (OELAEAALEPS)” (p. 541). She interprets the wording of NCLB as discouraging bilingual education and promoting an English-only policy in the United States.

Fredricks and Warriner (2016) analyzed Arizona state policies on bilingual education and also conducted a qualitative study of the impact of those policies at an elementary school in Phoenix that consisted of in-depth interviews, field notes, and focus groups. Arizona passed Proposition 203, “English for Children,” in November of 2000, with the objective to facilitate the teaching of English to youth designated as ELL “as rapidly and efficiently as possible” and the mandate that “a statewide Structured English Immersion (SEI) model be implemented for all students classified as ELL” (A.R.S. 15-706.01). Important aspects of this structure are that the instruction must be in English only, for a minimum of four hours per day. The legislation also requires the use

of instructional materials in English, and it mandates that fundamental subjects such as reading and writing be taught in English. In this highly controlled school environment, the child's first language cannot be used even to make sure that the child understands lessons and assignments, and is therefore for at home use only. Clearly, these requirements reflect the control and predictability aspects of McDonaldization as well as that of efficiency in the overall goals of the legislation.

An immediate consequence of these mandates is that children in this type of program are not allowed to learn subject matter appropriate for their grade level (science, math, social science) because of the four-hour English demand, which must continue for an entire school year. Fredricks and Warriner (2016) note that "teachers are required to teach English in English and teachers are not responsible for covering academic content" (p. 310). This is another aspect of McDonaldized control. However, ELL students are required to take state-wide mandated standardized-tests despite the fact that they are not as prepared for them as native English speakers. ELL students are, thus, left "unprepared for instruction in the content areas such as math, science, social studies, and reading" (Fredricks & Warriner, 2016, p. 310). This is an example of what Ritzer (2015) calls the "irrationality of excessive rationality" (p. 132). By this phrase, the irrationality of excessive rationality, Ritzer meant to capture the irony that by following the seemingly rational goals of calculability, control, predictability, and efficiency, one sometimes achieves the very opposite of those stated goals. In the case of Arizona, the goal of equalizing all students ironically deprives ELLs of an equal and fair chance of

achieving high scores on the content-area standardized tests because of the McDonaldized efforts to prepare them for those tests.

Administrators and teachers in Arizona follow the Discrete Skills Inventory (DSI, developed by Kevin Clark, n.d. as cited by Fredricks & Warriner, 2016, p. 321) which sets achievement goals in reading, writing, listening, speaking, and vocabulary. This is an example of McDonaldized calculability in the sense that the pathways for achieving these goals are not left up to the judgment of individual educators but are instead calculated ahead of time by government officials. All students who enroll in Arizona public schools are given a survey to determine if a non-English language is spoken at home. If it is, then the child is given the Arizona English Language Learning Assessment (AZELLA) test. If the child is not determined to be proficient in English, he or she is placed in the ELL program. Each child is tested yearly. Those who are scored as proficient in English are allowed to take mainstream classes. Those who are determined to be non-proficient after one year are required to remain in the ELL program for another year of four hours per day immersion in English and continue to be excluded from mainstream subjects (Fredricks & Warriner, 2016). Even those who are determined to be proficient, continue to be monitored for two years and are again given the AZELLA.

This elaborate process for teaching English to ELL students in Arizona exhibits all of the elements of the McDonaldization process. The goal of teaching English proficiency in only one year is viewed as efficient, according to Ritzer's (2015) definition of efficiency as "just-in-time production, faster service, streamlined

operations, and rigid schedules” (p.58). The AZELLA test is assumed to be an accurate predictor of language proficiency, and because it is a standardized test, it exhibits the calculability component of McDonaldization. Learning English as a second language without any use of the child’s first language—not even to translate or explain assignments—bespeaks control. Finally, the formula for how a student may exit the ELL program is one of extreme calculability: It is as if the child were trapped in the Iron Cage of a rigid ELL program and had been initially placed on parole rather than released into the mainstream population of students.

There is general consensus among scholars in the field of second language acquisition that language learning requires at least five to eight years for students to develop the English proficiency needed for grade-appropriate content-area instruction (Fredricks & Warriner, 2016; Cummins, 2006; Hakuta, Butler, & Witt, 2000). In addition, there is consensus among many scholars that a second language is learned best through content-area instruction, and many scholars argue for a contextualized, content-based, second language education program (Crawford & Krashen, 2007; Cummins, 2014; Hakuta, Butler, & Witt, 2000; August, Goldenberg, & Rueda, 2010; Krashen, MacSwain, & Rolstad, 2012). Finally, and despite the fact that ELL students in Arizona are segregated from mainstream instruction, they are expected to be proficient on the No Child Left Behind standardized tests that are based upon content-area instruction. This is problematic because, according to the aforementioned studies, ELLs who did not learn English through content-based instruction will be less proficient in English than those who did.

## DISCUSSION OF FINDINGS

How can one explain the legislation pertaining to ESL instruction, given that it seems to be at odds with academic research on such instruction? Fredricks and Warriner (2016) cite xenophobia, political promises, and language-as-a-problem perspectives as key aspects of these dispositions in Arizona. For example, the Arizona legislation seems to rely upon the view that “children learn English fastest and best in an environment that gives it maximum exposure by excluding all other languages from the classroom” (Fredericks & Warriner, 2016, p. 312). Xenophobia does not necessarily imply the goals of “fastest” and “best” English acquisition. The McDonaldization process is missing in this and similar discussions of language ideology and privilege.

The literature on linguistic imperialism, linguistic ideology, privilege, and xenophobia is extensive, and is used by some authors to explain findings that are interpreted in this thesis by McDonaldization (Domke, 2018; Martinez et al., 2015; Ridgeway & Pewewardy, 2004). The important point is that this body of literature does not include Ritzer’s (2015) concept of the McDonaldization of society as part of this discussion. At the very least, McDonaldization is part of the general dispositions in contemporary American society, and resembles an ideology. To what extent it is related to xenophobia and privilege are issues that should be included in such discussions.

The study by Fredricks and Warriner (2016) used participant-observation research methods at an elementary school in Phoenix, Arizona that serves 690 students, kindergarten through sixth grade. Over 90% of the students were ELL, reclassified ELL, or recently exited from the ELL program. The participants in their study included

administrators, educators, and students. Data were collected over the course of six months using participant-observation methods, in-depth interviews, field notes, and focus groups. The overall finding concerning the teachers was that teachers basically went along, without protest or overt criticism, with the mandated Arizona ELL program requirements. Of interest is that the rationalizations used by the teachers to justify the program imply McDonaldization: the practicality of using English only for monolingual teachers, classroom uniformity, and assessment preparation for standardized tests such as the AZELLA.

Out of the vast universe of possible rationalizations and justifications for the Arizona ELL programs, ranging from xenophobia to possibly feeling depressed about being unable to change the system, the teachers in Fredricks and Warriner's (2016) study articulated their reasons resorting to vocabulary akin to that of McDonaldization. Apparently, the teachers felt comfortable with the control, predictability, calculability, and apparent efficiency of the program. The researchers quote several different teachers as telling students "We speak English here" whenever they would hear someone speak a non-English language. Also, educators routinely reprimanded students in this regard. In Ritzer's (1993, 2015) terminology, the teachers apparently betrayed no desires to escape or fight the Iron Cage in which they worked.

In addition, Fredricks and Warriner (2016) found that students generally internalized the viewpoint that ELL students, were "less intelligent, less adept, and less proficient than other youth with higher levels of proficiency in English" (p. 317). Citing the sociological theory of Bourdieu (1986) on cultural capital, defined as social assets

such as education and style of speech that promote social mobility, the researchers concluded that the students came to view English proficiency as a cultural capital which they wanted to attain. Thus, they avoided using their native languages in school at all because they did not want to be reprimanded and also because they had internalized the assumption that using their native languages was something negative compared to the high and privileged status of English. Again, the researchers do not report anything that could be construed as rebellion against or desire to escape from this Iron Cage.

In their conclusions, Fredricks and Warriner (2016) cite the negative effects of the Arizona ELL program, namely, low-levels of academic achievement and negative self-perception among the students. However, the researchers—like the teachers and students in their study—do not protest the structure of the Arizona system for bilingual education. Instead, they offer two main policy recommendations. First, “the four-hour block should integrate content-based learning with language learning so that youth are not at such a disadvantage upon reclassification” (p. 321). Second, and in addition to the state mandated six hours of SEI training, they call for more professional teacher development and support that will “help them work with the population of learners that is reflective of the communities in which they teach” (p. 321). These welcome recommendations do not address the issue of language ideologies that the authors used to frame the issues they investigated. By doing so, they ignore the McDonaldized aspects of the Arizona ESL program that completely forbids students’ use of their first language and also controls, standardizes, calculates, and turns the schools into Iron Cages. As

predicted by Ritzer (2015), the Iron Cage is simply accepted with a few small modifications at best.

In a similar study, Hickey (2016), offers another illustration of how Ritzer's (1993, 2015) McDonaldization theory offers a cogent explanation and interpretation of how ESL is actually taught in the United States in the context of NCLB and other aspects of a culture of standardization. Hickey does not disclose the location of the school that she studied but her work was based on the investigation of elementary emergent bilinguals, a term she uses interchangeably with ELLs. She begins her paper by recalling that when she asked her students, "Why do we read?" she received the answer, "So we can do good on the test." The student's answer exemplifies the theme of "teaching to the test" that has been explored, and is the opposite of the humanistic theme that reading should be a joyful experience in learning.

For example, Hickey points out that because of the mandated No Child Left Behind (NCLB) standardized tests, "Poor performance by emergent bilinguals on high stakes assessments is problematic for districts and schools with disproportionate numbers of these students" (p. 17). ELLs typically score lower on these tests than native English speakers because their English proficiency is still in progress, and because—as we have seen in the case of Arizona—they are segregated from mainstream students and content-related learning. Nevertheless, they are blamed for low average scores at their schools, and the schools, teachers, and districts are punished for poor performance by being denied funding and pay raises. ELLs are penalized and turned into scapegoats. According to Hickey (p. 18), "Neoliberalism, with its emphasis on numbers,



accountability, and quantification of school success, has served to further marginalize emergent bilinguals.” All of these terms resonate with Ritzer’s (2015) concepts of calculability, predictability, control, and efficiency. The overall, negative outcome for students and school districts alike again resembles the irrationality of excessive rationality (p. 132). Students are not seen as unique individuals with unique circumstances, but are put into boxes and “into positions of deficit and disability” (p. 18).

Hickey (2016) also describes “a culture of testing and standardization” at the school on which her study is based, without mentioning the concept of McDonaldization. For example, upon entering the school, she was confronted with a large “racetrack” on the wall with the bilingual students as cars with scores for the quarterly standardized assessments (p. 23). This meant that students could compare their scores with those of other students, a clear example of McDonaldized calculability. Students felt pressured, defeated, nervous, and stigmatized by this public standardization. For example, one student expressed how sad he was that he was labeled as “below level” (for his grade) in reading, and “wanted to get out of the BL label and move successfully into grade level books that didn’t wear the stigma of BL” (p. 25).

In addition, Hickey (2016) reports that teachers were aware of the stress and “test fatigue” that the students experienced. The most serious problem for the ELL students in Hickey’s study was that they were excluded from after school programs. This result could be interpreted by the use of McDonaldized efficiency, which could be seen in the justification to exclude ESL students from after school preparation for the annual

assessments as administrators deemed it inefficient to pour resources into ESL students, who were written off as a drag on the school's average scores on these tests. Thus, Hickey (2016) pointedly notes that the goal of equity as justification for the NCLB assessments had the opposite effect.

Hickey (2016) found that ESL students approached their assignments as work that had to be performed efficiently, in accordance with a controlled curriculum, and on a predictable path—which are all elements of McDonaldization- minus joy in learning: Moreover, students perceived reading as work that had to be done quickly, or in the vocabulary of McDonaldization, efficiently (Ritzer, 2015). Teachers also felt that they had to “stop” teaching and “do review for four weeks” to prepare students for the standardized assessments (Hickey, 2016, p. 29). In summary, Hickey writes: “The students and teachers whose experiences are shared in this article felt their lives at school were driven by the need to work efficiently” (Hickey, 2016, p. 29).

Whereas all the humanistic psychologists thought of play and recess as important for child development, socialization, and learning, recess is perceived as something inefficient that should be controlled in McDonaldized culture. Hickey (2016) illustrates this point with an extended analysis of recess at the school in which she conducted her research. Control at the school Hickey observed included surveillance of students and teachers, accountability, issuing reprimands and punishments, and monitoring all movements to and from recess, the cafeteria, and in the hallways.

The important point is that if one were to apply the principles of humanistic psychology to ESL, then play in general and play at recess in particular should be

important components of such an education. Children learn from each other informally and spontaneously. By McDonaldizing recess and play through control and efficiency, educators deprive children of an important component of education. Furthermore, children were not allowed to talk to each other during lunch. In her conclusion, Hickey (2016) bemoans the tendencies “to speed up or intensify labor” and to impact time and space (p. 36). It seems that most of Hickey’s findings are easily explained by McDonaldization. Moreover, Hickey does not offer any solutions or recommendations for improving the dehumanizing situation that she documents. The ELLs in her study are at a constant disadvantage relative to native English speakers, because they are assessed seemingly constantly but have not mastered English sufficiently to compete fairly. The result is a negative self-image for emergent bilinguals, and it is made worse by the control mechanisms and structures that exist in most American schools because of McDonaldization.

## CHAPTER V

### CONCLUSIONS

The goal of this study has been to connect Ritzer's (1993, 2015) sociological theory of the McDonaldization of society to education in general and to ESL education in the United States in particular. Ritzer builds his theory on Weber's (1904, 1958) classic sociological concept of modernity as an Iron Cage. Ritzer isolates efficiency, predictability, control, and calculability as the main elements of McDonaldization. Like Weber, he is a pessimist when it comes to the question of how one can resist or escape from the Iron Cage.

Humanistic psychologists from the previous two centuries, including James (1899, 2000), Vygotsky (1978), Erikson (1993), Piaget (1971), and Dewey (2001) influenced the field of education and teacher training greatly. Their assumptions and findings are contrary to the McDonaldization process: joy in learning, every child has a unique self that develops at its own pace, the importance of play and socialization in development, learning is a life-long process, curiosity is the most important motivator, etc.

Despite the positive impact of the theories of humanistic psychology, education in America has been largely taken over by McDonaldization. One of the most significant shifts has been the implementation of standardized tests, best illustrated by NCLB, ESSA, and other programs, legislation, and mandated state-wide tests such as Regents in New York and AZELLA in Arizona. The ubiquitous use of standardized tests illustrates

all the elements of McDonaldization: efficiency, predictability, control, and calculability (Krol, 2011; Menken 2006; Rose & Whitley, 2010; Stan, 2013; Trubowitz, 1972; Wilkinson 2006). The important similarities between NCLB and ESSA are use of standardized tests, punishment of schools for poor performance, discouragement of bilingual education, and focus on quick and efficient mastery of English for ELL students (Adler-Greene, 2019; Fusarelli, 2019, Karp, 2016, Saultz, Schneider, & McGovern, 2019).

The focus on standardized tests, along with punishments for schools and teachers for failures to meet goals and standards, means that ELLs take these tests often unprepared to fully comprehend the questions, and in general, to have access to what Li (2007) calls a meaningful education. In Arizona, ELLs are expected to master English in one year even though researchers have found that five to eight years are required (Cummins, 2006; Crawford & Krashen, 2007; Fredricks & Warriner, 2016; Hakuta, Butler, & Witt, 2000). The drive for efficiency means that the expectation that language learning will be faster has taken place. Teachers as well as students are almost constantly monitored and controlled. The consequences of these aspects of McDonaldized education include a loss of self-confidence among ELLs, higher dropout rates, and loss of meaning (Li, 2007). These consequences are the opposite of the goals of humanistic psychology, which include nurturing the development of self-identities in students who find joy, purpose, and meaning in learning.

Some of these trends have been noticed by researchers and are attributed to various socio-cultural factors such as neoliberalism and language ideologies, but not to

McDonaldization. A key implication and recommendation of this study is that the theory of McDonaldized society should be connected to these other explanations. The purpose of this thesis has been to suggest that that these various theoretical explanations should enter into dialogue with each other, and that McDonaldization theory should not be excluded from such discussions and research studies. This is because they all emphasize drives toward efficiency, standardization, predictability, and control, yet offer different explanations for them.

Ritzer's (2015) pessimistic conclusion that nothing can be done to remedy the Iron Cage should not be the last word. An important area for future study could be on how the principles of humanistic psychology can be implemented by administrators and teachers in limited ways despite the trend toward McDonaldization. For example, more time for spontaneous recess (given the importance of play and spontaneity for child development) could be calculated into the busy work-day of public schools. This move alone could have a positive impact upon ELLs whose self-confidence is damaged by impossible demands to meet the standards of mandated, state-wide standardized tests without full mastery of English. The important, overall point is that the principles of humanistic psychology should be placed in dialogue with McDonaldization.

Future research should focus on the tension experienced by educators in ESL programs who attempt to balance the demands of the McDonaldization of education with the principles of humanistic psychology. Do educators develop symptoms of stress because of pressures and stress they experience that has been described in the literature? If they do, what are these symptoms? Future research should also address the support, or

lack of support, that ELL educators experience in the era of standardized tests. The literature reviewed in this thesis does not explore the issue of support beyond vague generalities. The recommended research should examine various possible forms of support, ranging from the social support of educators' peers through institutional sources all the way through socio-cultural sources of support.

Future research should also explore the effects of these McDonaldized, mandated, standardized tests upon ELL students. Li (2007) found that the culture of standardization resulted in higher drop-out rates and lower test scores on ELL students, but her study is somewhat dated. More recent data on the indicators she used, in addition to other indicators, should be used to assess the overall impact on ELL students. As with educators, are ELL students experiencing more stress and exhibiting more symptoms than in the decades prior to the implementation of NCLB?

Finally, research could focus on the legislators and administrators who continue to devise an increasingly McDonaldized culture of standardization that defies the principles of humanistic psychology. What is the rationale for why legislators and administrators continue to pursue a path that has been criticized by Ritzer (2015) and other sociologists? Qualitative studies that include in-depth interviews with legislators, administrators, and their staff could provide answers to these questions.

In conclusion, the overall goal of this study has been to contrast the principles of McDonaldized education with those of humanistic psychology, and apply the tension between these opposing trends to ESL instruction and assessment. There is a cultural and sociological context to these opposing principles that must be taken into account when

educators consider issues such as curriculum development, assessment, the use of standardized tests, lesson plans, and other components of education. Ritzer's highly influential sociological theory of the McDonaldization of society and education needs to be extended to ESL education, and put into dialogue with theories and explanations that researchers in ESL use to conduct their studies.



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